

VZCZCXRO7554
OO RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHKP #0627/01 3381410

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 031410Z DEC 08
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0823
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0286
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0187
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1775
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 2610
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 4493
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFSS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000627

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER SOCI PK
SUBJECT: ETHNIC VIOLENCE SHAKES KARACHI

REF: ISLAMABAD 3690

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY ACTING CONSUL GENERAL CATHERINE RODRIGUEZ
FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Up to 50 people have been killed in violent ethnic riots between Pashtuns and Mohajirs since November 27. While the specific action that sparked sporadic attacks is unclear, the ruling Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) movement has been warning for months of the increased 'talibanization' of the city from a growing number of Pashtuns fleeing military operations in the northern Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Both the Pashtun-based Awami National Party (ANP) and the MQM, which have been arming in preparation for a confrontation, blamed each other.

Layoffs and ten-hour power shortages have exacerbated existing ethnic tensions. To calm the situation the government cancelled schools and gave newly assigned Rangers shoot-to-kill orders; the Governor has appointed a "peace committee" and hopes this will also help defuse tensions. Meanwhile, President Zardari pressed Ambassador and UK Ambassador on November 23 to pressure London-based MQM leader Altaf Hussain to order MQM to stop the violence. End summary.

¶12. (C) A confrontation that began on November 27 between Mohajirs (descendents of Muslim immigrants from India) and Pashtuns accelerated on November 29 despite a joint press conference by leaders of the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), the Awami National Party (ANP) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) calling for calm. Over 50 have been killed in the violence thus far, which finally appears to be subsiding.

The violence has been centered in districts that have a mixture of Pashtun and Mohajir residents, such as Karachi's Orangi, Baldia and Site Townships.

Sindh Government Takes Action

¶13. (SBU) On November 30, Sindh Home Minister Zulfiqar Mirza issued orders to shoot rioters "on sight." On that same day, the provincial government called for a December 1 school "holiday." On December 1, universities postponed exams until after December 3. Police and Rangers have reportedly moved into the hardest hit areas.

Political Parties Concerned

¶14. (C) Sindh ANP President Shahi Syed told PolOff on December 3 that he believed MQM incited the violence to counter ANP's growing political power in Karachi. According to him, the majority of those killed have been Pashtuns, which make up the core of his party's base, and accused the

MQM of unfairly profiling all Pashtuns as Taliban. Syed claimed that over 137 Pashtun businesses had been targeted and many in the Pashtun-dominated transport industry were afraid to take to the streets.

¶5. (C) Sindh PPP Secretary General Nafees Siddiqui blamed "those elements who were threatened by Pashtuns" and their new assembly seats, an obvious reference to MQM. (Note: The Pashtun dominated ANP won two Sindh Provincial Assembly seats from Karachi in the February 18 election. This was a first for the party. End note.)

MQM's Version

¶6. (C) MQM Nazim (Mayor) Mustafa Kamal told PolOff on December 1 that his party has been exercising restraint and trying to prevent the violence from spreading. He claimed that rioters have targeted MQM party members and said that party leadership ordered party workers to stay indoors. He blamed the violence on a third party, the Taliban, since ANP, PPP and MQM were coalition partners and could gain nothing by destabilizing the city.

¶7. (C) Deputy MQM Provincial Assembly leader Faisal Sabzwari, a participant in the November 29 press conference, warned that ethnic violence could escalate. He predicted that the Mohajirs would start "fighting back" soon if the police don't take the situation more seriously. According to him, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) run Home Ministry is not taking the situation seriously enough despite repeated

KARACHI 00000627 002 OF 002

MQM requests to coalition partner PPP for assistance.

¶8. (C) Sabzwari said, the PPP has dragged its feet in restoring order because these areas are partially MQM dominated. He had similar concerns about ANP's willingness to halt Pashtun violence. Sabzwari described Pashtuns firing from hillsides onto Mohajirs in Orangi Township, resulting in a number of fatalities. He recalled a similar incident in 1986 that resulted in over 350 Mohajir deaths and said his party could not allow a repeat. He requested USG assistance to get action from the GOP.

¶9. (C) In Islamabad, President Zardari asked Ambassador and the UK Ambassador in a joint meeting on November 23 for help in convincing London-based MQM leader Altaf Hussain to step in and control the violence. The UK Ambassador agreed that someone from his government would get in touch with Hussain (reftel).

Governor Steps In

¶10. (C) Sindh Governor Dr. Ishrat-ul-Ibad (MQM) told PolOff that leaders of ANP, MQM, PPP, Sunni Terek (ST), Jamaat Islami (JI), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) agreed on December 1 to form a "Peace Committee" that will help law enforcement personnel maintain order in areas affected by the disorder. He said that the situation in Karachi had begun to ease and that he expected a significant improvement over the next few days. Ibad blamed the violence on criminal elements not related to any political party.

Police Raid Refugee Camp

¶11. (C) December 3 media reports prominently featured the arrest of a number of Pashtuns during a December 2 police raid on an Afghan refugee camp in Karachi's Sohrab Goth area. Police officials claimed they had caught several important suspects. However, Inspector Irfan Ahmed Khan, a Karachi police official, told RSO on December 3 that the raid was more show than substance. According to him, the police arrested 28 refugees and confiscated six pistols. Khan said

the detainees were not involved in the recent violence and predicted they would be released in a few days.

¶12. (C) Comment: Karachi is a city famed for its Machiavellian politics and its ethnic violence. Ultimately, it may be impossible to blame the riots on any one source. The recent inflow of Pashtuns fleeing military operations in the northern Federally Administered Tribal Areas has prompted MQM leaders to warn of the 'Talibanization' of Karachi for several months now. Karachi is also suffering from ten-hour power outages every day, a problem that has led to declining industrial productivity and layoffs just as food and fuel prices have escalated. The Governor, widely known as a peacemaker, appears cautiously optimistic that the tension in the city will soon abate. End comment.

RODRIGUEZ